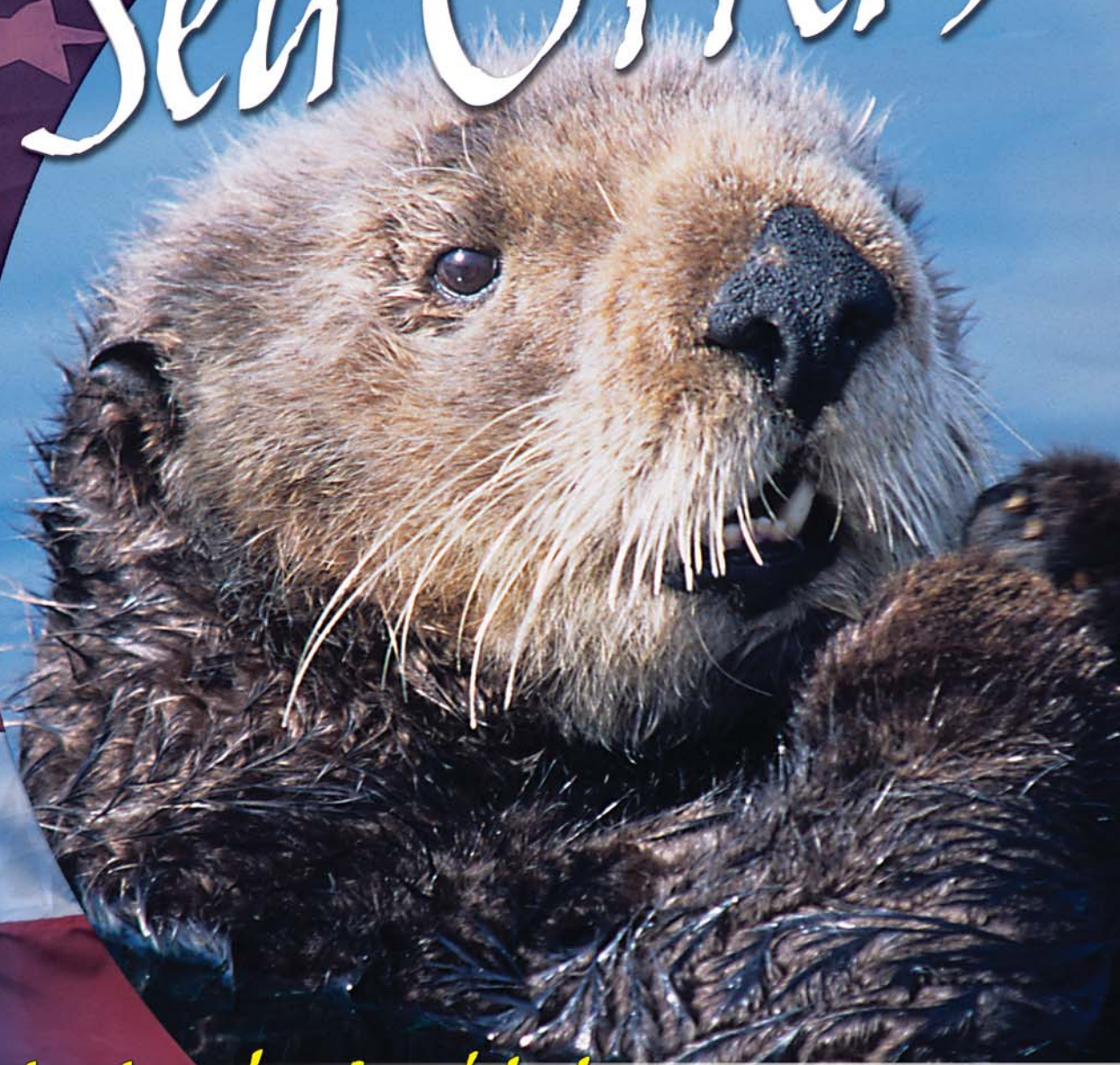


America's  
**ANIMAL  
COMEBACKS**

# Southern Sea Otters



*Fur-tastrophe Avoided*

by Jeanette Leardi

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# *Southern Sea Otters*

*Fur-tastrophe Avoided*



by Jeanette Leardi

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Research Scientist  
U.S. Geological Survey

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A Surprising Discovery.....	4
Greedy for Fur.....	6
One More Chance.....	8
Helping Sea Otters.....	10
Caught in the Nets.....	12
A New Home.....	14
A Special Species.....	16
Keeping Track.....	18
Pups at Risk.....	20
Deadly Pollution.....	22
A Big Victory.....	24
The Future.....	26
Southern Sea Otter Facts.....	28
Other Marine Mammals in Danger.....	29
Glossary.....	30
Bibliography.....	31
Read More.....	31
Learn More Online.....	31
Index.....	32
About the Author.....	32



# *A Surprising Discovery*

On March 19, 1938, Howard Sharpe was looking out at the California **coast**. From his porch, he gazed at the Pacific Ocean through his telescope. Suddenly, he saw a startling sight. About 300 small furry animals were floating on their backs in the **kelp beds**.

Southern sea otters float together in groups called rafts.





The animals looked like southern sea otters. Were Sharpe's eyes fooling him? Scientists had thought that these creatures were nearly **extinct**.

Sharpe reported his discovery to the government. A few days later, animal experts gathered at the shore and saw the **rare** creatures. One expert said he would have been almost as surprised to see live dinosaurs!

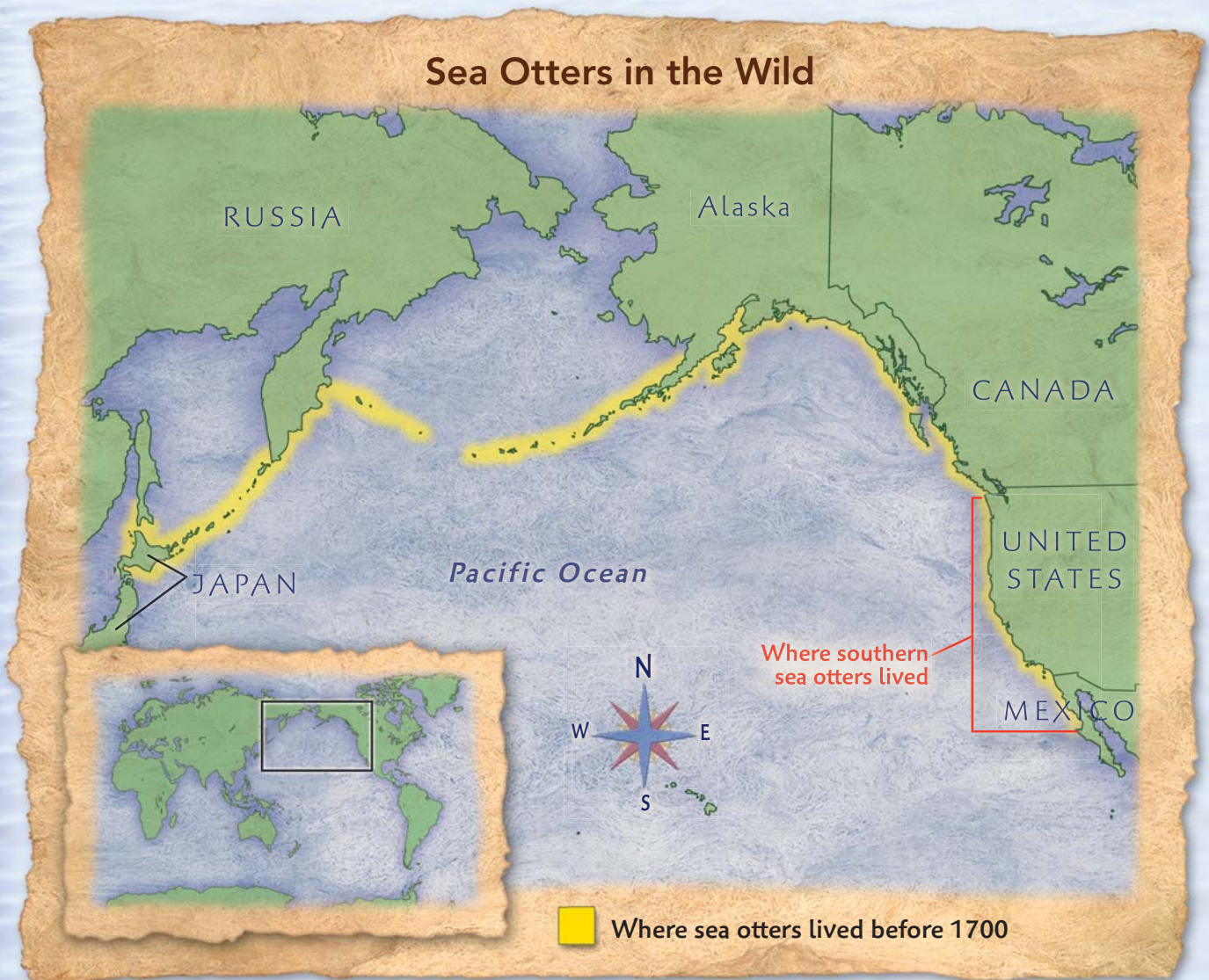


Today, southern sea otters live only along the California coast. They are one of three kinds of sea otters. Northern sea otters and Russian sea otters live in other parts of the Pacific Ocean.



# Greedy for Fur

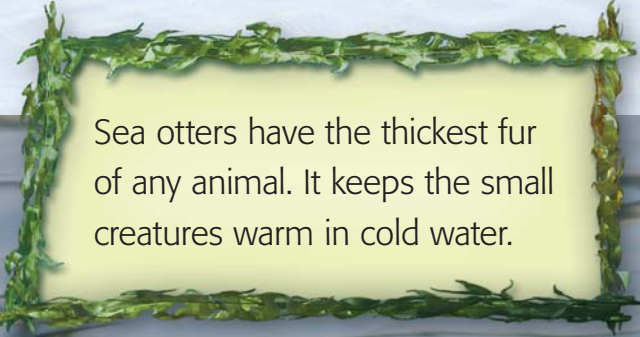
Sea otters were not always so rare. Between 200,000 and one million of them once made their homes along the rocky shore of the Pacific Ocean. Up to 16,000 southern sea otters lived along the western coast of the United States and parts of northern Mexico.





Then, in the 1700s, European and Russian sailors discovered the otters. They hunted the animal for its thick, warm fur.

For nearly 200 years, thousands of sea otters were killed each year. In 1911, so few were left that many countries finally agreed to stop hunting them. Yet many people believed it was too late. By 1938, some scientists thought the southern sea otter had disappeared completely. That was when Howard Sharpe made his surprising discovery.



Sea otters have the thickest fur of any animal. It keeps the small creatures warm in cold water.



# Index

- blue whale 29
- California 4–5, 8, 12, 15, 18, 22, 24–25, 26–27, 28
- diseases 23, 29
- ecosystem 16–17
- Endangered Species Act 28
- Exxon Valdez* 24
- fishing nets 11, 12–13, 14, 19, 29
- Friends of the Sea Otter 9, 10
- fur 7, 25, 28
- great white shark 23
- Hawaiian monk seal 29
- hunting 7, 10, 28–29
- kelp 4, 16–17
- Marine Mammal Protection Act 10
- Mattison, Jim 9
- oil rigs 25
- oil spills 14, 24–25
- Owings, Margaret 9
- pesticides 23
- pollution 22–23, 24, 29
- pups 20–21, 22
- radio transmitters 20
- refuge 8
- relocating 14–15
- San Nicolas Island 8, 14–15
- sea urchins 16–17, 28
- Sharpe, Howard 4–5, 7, 8, 27

## About the Author

Jeanette Leardi has written many educational books for children, and poems, articles, and essays for adults. She is the author of *The Great Pyramid: Egypt's Tomb for All Time*.



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# *Southern Sea Otters*

## *Fur-tastrophe Avoided*

On March 19, 1938, Howard Sharpe was looking out at the Pacific Ocean. Suddenly, he saw a startling sight. About 300 small furry animals were floating in the water. Were Sharpe's eyes fooling him? The animals looked like southern sea otters. Thousands of them had once lived off the California coast. Yet after being hunted for hundreds of years, many people thought they were extinct. Was there still time to save the southern sea otter from dying out?

**American Alligators**  
Freshwater Survivors

**American Bison**  
A Scary Prediction

**Bald Eagles**  
A Chemical Nightmare

**Black-footed Ferrets**  
Back from the Brink

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